

## The Building Doctor Is In

**A**iling buildings in Ohio have a “doctor” on call. For 25 years, the Ohio Historic Preservation Office (OHPO) of the Ohio Historical Society has, in partnership with local communities, sponsored Building Doctor clinics. This two-part outreach program is designed to help owners of older buildings learn and understand the basics of good preservation and rehabilitation.

Each clinic starts with an evening presentation by the Building Doctors, covering everything from identifying significant features of old buildings to the basics of “The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties” to maintenance issues unique to older structures. A question and answer period at the end addresses participants’ general rehabilitation or maintenance questions.

### *House Calls*

The following day, the Doctors make house calls. Any property that is at least 50 years old is eligible for a visit from a Building Doctor. On

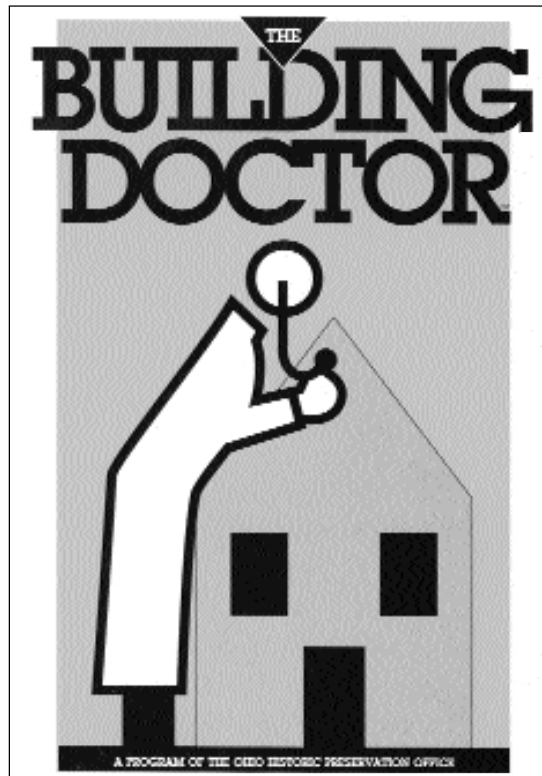
site, property owners get the Doctors’ assistance with all manner of ailments, including leaking roofs, drafty windows, peeling paint, rotted wood, deteriorated masonry, and wet basements. Doctors may suggest that the property owner consult a specialist (for example, a structural engineer or an architect) about certain problems. Doctors may also leave behind copies of the National Park Service’s Preservation Briefs series to reinforce treatment issues and options covered either in the presentation or onsite.

The Building Doctors all have master’s degrees in history, historic preservation, architectural history, or planning. Before Building Doctors are permitted to conduct site visits independently they must have one year’s experience in the field working on historic rehabilitation projects. All new Doctors shadow an experienced Doctor for a season.

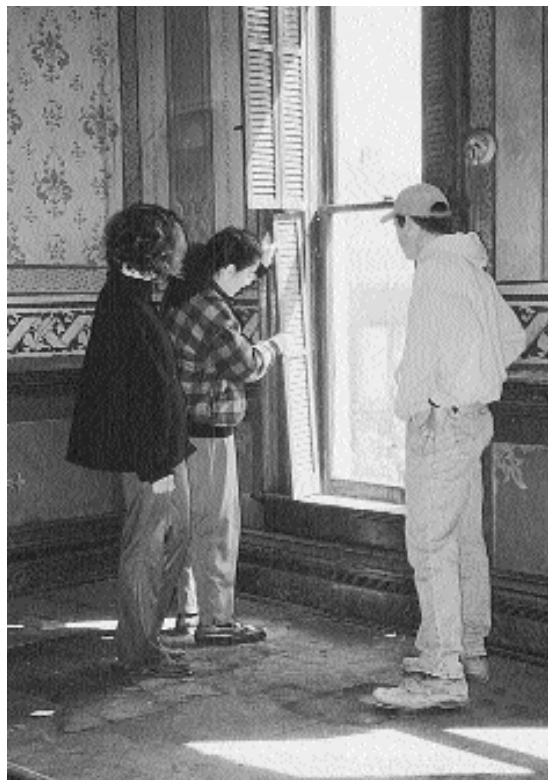
The evening clinics and house calls are open to the public and free so that everyone, regardless of means, has access to the program. The Preservation Office does charge community cosponsors of the Building Doctor clinics a fee of \$275 to cover some program costs.

Eight Building Doctor clinics are held between April and October each year, but demand for clinics always outweighs availability. Cosponsoring communities are selected based on factors including location, preservation needs, demonstrated ability to host a clinic, time since the last visit, and time spent on the waiting list. OHPO tries to balance the Building Doctor schedule so that a clinic is held in most parts of the State every season.

Once Building Doctor communities have been selected, work begins to ensure a successful clinic. Fundamental to this success is a contract detailing OHPO and cosponsor responsibilities. OHPO provides and distributes brochures publicizing the event, works with the media, accepts registrations, provides program booklets and information folders distributed at the seminars, and provides two Building Doctors per clinic to make the presentation and conduct the site visits. The cosponsor assists with local publicity,



*The Building Doctor answers questions about the treatment of windows and other issues that challenge owners of older properties. Photo courtesy the Ohio Historic Preservation Office.*



arranges the seminar location, provides overnight accommodations for the Building Doctors, and provides local guides to accompany them on the site visits.

### **25th Season**

The first Building Doctor program was held in Portsmouth, OH, in 1979 and was modeled after a similar program sponsored at the time by the Midwest Office of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Its purpose then, as today, is to reach property owners of historic buildings who might not otherwise be served by the OHPO through traditional programs such as Federal grants, tax credits, or the National Register of Historic Places program. Through the Building Doctor clinics, OHPO raises public awareness about historic buildings and their care and maintenance. The Building Doctor program is arguably the most successful program OHPO offers to provide basic information on the care of historic buildings.

The Building Doctor program celebrates its 25th season in 2003, and OHPO continues to strive to improve the program with improved media presentations, improved marketing materials, and improved means for gauging customer satisfaction.

Information gathered from the public assists OHPO in refining the program. As a

result of participant comments, OHPO created a wood conservation seminar and a Building Doctor program for commercial properties. This feedback also highlighted topics most important to clinic participants. In response, OHPO created technical fact sheets – FastFacts – that offer property owners a brief overview of common issues affecting older buildings.

### **Program Benefits**

Through the Building Doctor program, OHPO spreads the message of good preservation to a large and diverse audience, giving building owners the basic information that they need to make informed decisions. In addition, the clinics get technical information into the hands of the folks directly responsible for rehabilitation projects. An added benefit is the opportunity for OHPO professional staff to work in the field, which helps the staff increase their knowledge and understanding of local issues.

Ohio's communities are also benefiting. Building Doctor cosponsors from the past five seasons were recently surveyed and with 75 percent responding, every community indicated that it would readily cosponsor another Building Doctor clinic. In addition, many communities stated that as a result of the clinics, preservation libraries were created and preservation review boards and downtown revitalization committees were started or given a boost. Cosponsors reported that the program reinforced the message that existing local preservation organizations were trying to get out about sensitive rehabilitation. Perhaps the most important benefit of the Building Doctor program is that it helps engage the citizens of Ohio in historic preservation in a way that is both useful and enjoyable.

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Although the name “Building Doctor,” the Building Doctor logo, and the title of the technical briefs, “FastFacts,” are all copyrighted, the Ohio Historic Preservation Office is happy to share information on how to start a Building Doctor-style program in other communities. Contact program manager Mariangela F. Pfister at [mpfister@ohiohistory.org](mailto:mpfister@ohiohistory.org). To receive a 2003 Building Doctor brochure, call the Ohio Historic Preservation Office at 614-298-2000.